



America As Empire: Global Leader or Rogue Power?

Jim Garrison

Berrett-Koehler Publishers (Jan 9, 2004)

\$24.95 (192pp)

978-1-57675-281-4

In a culture ruled by celebrity gossip and bad TV, a book that shines a light on under-reported facts about the day's pressing issues merits attention. This volume offers readers a new way of looking at globalism, militarism, and our nation's relationship with the rest of the world. If not a great book, it is a potentially important one.

The author takes on the era's biggest questions: Will the U.S. expand its influence in the twenty-first century, or will it concentrate on making nice with other countries? Why do so many people across the globe resent America, and how can our leaders prevent that bitterness from leading to more violence? What can our leaders do (and what shouldn't they do) to prevent another 9/11?

Garrison is president of the San Francisco-based State of the World Forum, an organization dedicated to promoting principled leadership (and is not the Jim Garrison who wrote *On the Trail of the Assassins*). An active Democrat, Garrison largely manages to approach his subject without bias. Still, his book takes note of several facts that portray Republican President George W. Bush in an unflattering light. The Bush White House, Garrison points out, "has withdrawn from more international treaties than any administration in American history" and has shown little willingness to work within the framework of the United Nations and other international organizations.

The book's thesis suggests that America, as the world's sole superpower, must find a way to make the transition from empire to member of a global democracy. "Will imperial America," Garrison writes, "be remembered as the architect of the world's first global order or as a tragedy of epic proportions?" If, as we all must hope, our leaders strive for the former of those two options, America, Garrison argues, must become more of a team player when planning its military and environmental agendas.

In a book that grapples with huge issues in fewer than 300 pages, the author spends a bit too much time trying to relate the power and complications of contemporary America to those of the Roman Empire. That said, this is a book of fresh thinking and sharp ideas. If not definitive, it is a worthwhile read for those who want to go beyond the op-ed pages of their local or national newspaper.

KEVIN CANFIELD (March / April 2004)

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